



## Children's Corner

### The Many Benefits of Messy Play

Childhood is supposed to be messy. Children learn by exploring the world with all of their senses. To touch something is the way they learn about objects. Hands-on experiences with a variety of materials is crucial for their learning.

If parents feel uncomfortable with the mess, tell them "the dirtier your child gets at school, the better reader they will become."

Yes, messy materials can be a challenge for teachers. But there is a huge difference between children making a mess (which they certainly can do) and children getting messy. Children learn from getting messy and with the right water/sand table, bins, and drop cloths, you can use these materials to provide a wide variety of learning experiences for children of all ages. Soap and water clean it all off at the end of the day.

What exactly do children learn from getting messy?

#### **Cognitive Development**

Messy play focuses on process rather than product. As children explore different materials, they work on problem solving, curiosity, and decision making as they decide how to use the materials. They make observations and hypotheses. They learn math concepts such as grouping and matching. They learn science concepts like cause and effect (What happens if I...?), states of matter (solids and liquids). Their vocabularies grow as they use new words to describe what they are experiencing. Discovery is a creative process.

#### **Social and Emotional Development**

As children work together to explore materials, they enhance their social skills. They learn to cooperate and take turns. They listen to each other's ideas and express their opinions. They feel good about themselves, as they become competent learners. As children explore, they gain the confidence to try things they have never done before. This will later translate to the school setting. For example, the world of reading — sounding out letters and words they've never seen — could seem daunting unless children have had positive experiences stretching themselves, gaining confidence, and growing through

#### **Physical Development**

Children develop their small motor skills "while pouring, measuring, stirring, whisking, and manipulating the materials. They enhance their eye-hand coordination. They learn to control their bodies and give their bodies directions to accomplish tasks as they explore."

([http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article\\_view.aspx?ArticleID=227](http://www.earlychildhoodnews.com/earlychildhood/article_view.aspx?ArticleID=227))

#### **Get messy with -**

Water, Sand (dry and/or wet), and Dirt (dry and/or wet)  
Paint, Fingerpaint, Glue, and Paste  
Sawdust and Wood chips  
Cornstalks, Leaves, Twigs, and other Nature Materials  
Playdough, Clay, and Silly Putty  
Goop (cornstarch and a little water)  
Whipped Cream  
Ice cubes (add food coloring) and snow  
Plain Gelatin molded in bowls or molds  
Water sprinklers

### **Add –**

Funnels and sifters  
Different kinds of bowls, containers and buckets  
Colanders  
Cardboard tubes and straws  
Squeeze bottles  
Rocks and pebbles

